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SHORT COMMUNICATION

Scarce wood-decay beetles in a river floodplain farmed landscape in the Upper Thames Valley—The National Trust's Coleshill and Buscot Estate near Faringdon in the far west of VC22 (Berkshire—but currently within the administrative county of Oxfordshire) comprises a very large acreage of intensively managed farmland, probably no better or worse than the average farmland of the area. However, a recent biological survey revealed a surprisingly interesting range of deadwood-breeding beetles, including some generally regarded as collectively indicative of relict old forest conditions (Harding & Rose, 1986). In this respect the key feature of the estate is that it coincides with low-lying ground along the Thames and its minor tributary the River Cole. The two rivers include networks of field drains and hedgerows lined by mature and overmature trees, including old pollards as well as standards, and with crack willow, ash, oak and native black poplar. Only a few hundred years ago this would have been grazing marsh country and effectively an open pasture-woodland system—Buckland & Dinnin (1993) have pointed out that many localities with relatively rich saproxylic faunas have a core of old wetland, the wetness of the ground conditions having protected the tree cover from intensive exploitation for timber or small wood products. Thus today's fauna is a survival from an earlier landscape. Similarly interesting faunas have been noted also very close by to Buscot and Coleshill, along the Thames (M.F.V. Corley, in Peachey, 1982) and in other river floodplains, e.g. in the Severn Vale of Gloucestershire (Atty, 1983), the River Teme in Worcestershire (Whitehead, 1996), along the River Cam in Cambridgeshire (Kirby & Lambert, 1992) and the Darent in Kent (Williams, 1990).

Six nationally scarce (Hyman, 1992) beetles were found within the farmland:

Agrius panonicus (Pill. & Mitt.) (Buprestidae)—Nationally Scarce Category A—Kilmester Farm, SU251965, extensive borings and exit holes in bark of dead hedgerow oak, 9.viii.1995.

Agrius sinuatus (Olivier)—Nationally Scarce Category A—Step Farm, SU275951, characteristic D-shaped exit holes in dead hawthorns in old pasture, 7.viii.1995; Furzehill, Colleymore Farm, SU259940, two adults beaten from old hawthorn in old pasture, 8.viii.1995.

Ctesias serra (Fab.) (Dermestidae)—Nationally Scarce Category B—Step Farm, old hedgerow pollard, SU278957; and Manor Farm, old willow pollards, SU264992.

Anisoxya fuscula (Illiger) (Melandryidae)—Nationally Scarce Category A—Furzehill, Colleymore Farm, SU259940, three beaten from dead hawthorn in old pasture, 8.viii.1995; Kilmester Farm, SU245974, one beaten from a dead young willow, 9.viii.1995; Snowswick Copse, SU229958, one beaten from a dead hawthorn at woodland edge, 17.viii.1995.

Conopalpus testaceus (Olivier) (Melandryidae)—Nationally Scarce Category B—Colleymore Farm, one beaten from old oak, SU255924.

Cossonus parallelepipedus (Herbst) (Curculionidae)—Nationally Scarce Category B—Dead adults abundant plus a few live in trunk of large fallen poplar along drain

south of Waterloo Copse, SU239925, 17.viii.1995; also remains of dead adults in trunk of willow pollard at SU257930.

John Campbell (*pers. comm.*) of the Oxfordshire Museums Service has additionally taken *Ischnomera sanguinicollis* (Fab.) (Oedemeridae)—Nationally Scarce Category B—on the estate.

Cossonus parallelepipedus is a regular inhabitant of old crack willow pollards along river valleys and in other grazing marsh situations, while *Anisoxya fuscula* is often found in these situations as well, e.g. Alexander (1987). *Agrilus pannonicus* is, however, most likely a recent colonist. Its general increase in the western suburbs of London has been well-documented (Hackett, 1995) and the present record suggests that the species is moving westwards along the Thames Valley. The estate also includes two landscape parks, Coleshill Park and Buscot Park, although neither is known to be long-established and few deadwood beetles were found in them. Buscot Park had no accessible deadwood at the time of the survey, and the little available in Coleshill Park revealed *Bitoma crenata* (Fab.) (Colydiidae), *Pediacus dermestoides* (Fab.) (Cucujidae) and *Phymatodes testaceus* (L.) (Cerambycidae). *Ctesias serra* has been found at Coleshill previously. Certainly not of the same quality for deadwood fauna as the surrounding farmland! A large area of ancient woodland lies to the east of Buscot Park—Badbury Forest—but, as with the parkland, the deadwood beetle fauna is not exceptional. A long history of exploitation for wood products has resulted in a relatively poor fauna. The most interesting species found during the survey were *Platycis minuta* (Fab.) (Lycidae) and *Mycetophagus multipunctatus* (Fab.) (Mycetophagidae), of which only the former has nationally scarce status. The latter is very much a river floodplain species in the western parts of its GB range and likely therefore to occur also outside of this woodland, with the fauna described above.

Thus we have the interesting situation where ancient semi-natural woodland and historic parks are relatively poor in wood-decay fauna while the conventional farmland is relatively rich. K. N. A. ALEXANDER & A. P. FOSTER, National Trust, 33 Sheep Street, Cirencester, Glos GL7 1QW.

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